



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX) Full Committee

"Houston Strong: Hurricane Harvey Lessons Learned and the Path Forward"

April 9th, 2018

Remarks as Prepared

We are here today to ensure that we continue to shine a light on the needs of our region post Hurricane Harvey in a building that was integral to the response efforts. When the waters were rising, everyone was paying attention, but now that they've receded, we must not forget.

There were many cities and towns across the country that felt the wrath of a devastating natural disaster in 2017. However, few were impacted like the communities in this area.

When Harvey hit last August, it was the first Category 4 hurricane to make landfall on the continental United States since 2004. Approximately 34 trillion gallons of rainwater punished our state. This led to 1.4 million Texans evacuating their homes and 300,000 households were without power.

In the aftermath, over \$160 billion dollars in damage was left behind. It was the second most expensive storm in American history and *the* most expensive storm in our state's history.

But these are numbers and statistics anyone can read about. I was on the ground during the hurricane to oversee response efforts and toured many neighborhoods immediately after. Roads had turned into rivers and front yards looked like lonely islands. Cars were abandoned, homes were destroyed, and despair was everywhere I looked.

As I visited shelters and met with victims, I could see with my own eyes just how personally and emotionally devastating this storm had been. Moms and dads, brothers and sisters, even small children were taken from us. I will never forget how painful it was to see so many people suffer.

While this was one of the greatest natural disasters known to mankind, it was one of the most compassionate humanitarian missions. Even though our state was hurting, I have never been prouder to call myself a Texan. Brave first responders rescued people who were stranded on rooftops or stuck in flooded vehicles.

Thousands of ordinary citizens became extraordinary heroes, hopping into their own boats and searching for anyone who needed help.

There are so many untold stories of heroic actions of bravery. It really was the shining light during the dark times.

Seeing our communities come together - Texans saving Texas - is a true testament to what our state is all about.

But this went beyond Texas. I was proud of our country's efforts and the outpouring support we received during this tragedy.

There was strong coordination between federal, state, and local officials, with FEMA, the Coast Guard, and the Army Corps of Engineers playing key roles. Not only were about 20,000 lives saved, but over 5 million meals and 5 million liters of drinking water were delivered to those in need. This is the kind of teamwork that is vital to a successful recovery.

Since that time, I am proud to say that both parties in Washington have come together to pass supplemental relief packages that provide billions of dollars for FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, HUD's Community Development Block Grants, and Army Corps of Engineers flood mitigation projects. We must always make sure FEMA and other relevant agencies have the resources they need to respond to disasters.

Last July, the House passed the first ever-comprehensive reauthorization of the Department of Homeland Security with overwhelming bipartisan support. This will strengthen our first responders and frontline defenders and I am encouraged the Senate has finally started to take action on this. This bill has many key provisions that will help DHS better prepare for natural disasters.

While recovering from Harvey continues to be a struggle and challenge for people affected in Texas, I want Texans to know that the nation is still behind them and I remain here to help.

I would like to personally thank each of today's witnesses for being here today to discuss how we are continuing to work to recover from Harvey and how we can better prepare for the next dangerous natural disaster.

This Committee is grateful for your service and for all of your hard work during Hurricane Harvey and we look forward to hearing your testimony.

###